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ABSTRACT

The major purpose of the study was to develop a profile of nutrition paraprofessionals in Pennsylvania; a secondary purpose was to assess the personal benefit, if any, reported by the paraprofessionals as a result of working with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). During December, 1974 and January, 1975, questionnaires were sent to 209 nutrition paraprofessionals, representing the total number of nutrition paraprofessionals in Pennsylvania. The 96% questionnaire response indicated a socioeconomic profile showing a higher percentage in urban counties, a ratio of whites outnumbering blacks two to one, a large 35-49 year age group, an income of $3,000-$7,000, and formal education of nine to 12 years. The work profile indicated most paraprofessionals work with 31-50 families and had worked with EFNEP for more than three years. Respondents indicated a definite improvement in their food buying habits, felt growth in understanding people and how to relate to them, and found their association with EFNEP beneficial. Implications for extension programing include a consideration of the age of the paraprofessionals in comparison to the target audience and the possibility of additional methods of reaching client families to supplement the one-to-one technique. A bibliography is appended. (EA)

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A Profile of Paraprofessionals Working with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program in Pennsylvania

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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A Profile of Paraprofessionals Working with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program in Pennsylvania

A Professional Paper in

Extension Education

by

Linda Jeanne Nease

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Date of Approval:

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This study is part of a larger paper entitled, "A Profile of Paraprofessionals Working with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program in Pennsylvania." Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Education, the entire manuscript is on file at the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, 6 Weaver Building, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania, 16802.

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CHAPTER IV

CAPSULE DIGEST

Summary

This study was undertaken in order to develop a profile of the nutrition paraprofessionals in Pennsylvania. In so doing, the extension programming aimed at the paraprofessional could be planned, organized, and implemented from a more substantitive basis. Specifically, this researcher wanted to find out, in addition to the profile, if the paraprofessionals had taken steps to improve themselves through additional formal education, community involvement and improvement of their own and their families' nutritional habits vis-a-vis the nutritional habits of their clients' families. In previous studies of the paraprofessionals little data had been collected about the paraprofessionals that could be used to study these areas of concern.

A questionnaire was sent to the 51 counties participating in the EFNEP across the state of Pennsylvania during December, 1974 and January, 1975. The total number of nutrition paraprofessionals in Pennsylvania was 209 at that time. There were 199 usable questionnaires returned constituting a 96 percent response. Two counties, Montgomery and Lycoming, had no response account for the remaining 4 percent of the paraprofessionals. Thus, the reported findings were considered to hold for all paraprofessionals in Pennsylvania at the time of the study since it was assumed the ten non-respondents were not atypical in relation to their respondent cohorts.

Before stating the findings, conclusions and implications for future extension programming, a review of the major expected

findings of this paper is needed. The major expected findings were:

1. The paraprofessionals will have benefited beyond the salary from working with the EFNEP.
2. The paraprofessionals will indicate an enthusiasm for their job and a desire to help other people.

The study did meet the purposes set up as expressed through the major expected findings. The profile of the paraprofessionals was the first and foremost purpose of the study. The profile characteristics of the paraprofessionals uncovered through this study are listed below.

Socioeconomic Profile

A. The higher percentage of paraprofessionals are located in the urban counties around Pennsylvania.
B. Overall, whites outnumber black paraprofessionals by a ratio of 2 to 1. Blacks reside mostly in the urban areas while whites are found in urban, rural, and combined unit counties.
C. The largest age grouping of paraprofessionals was between 35-49 years.
D. The income bracket for the highest percentage of paraprofessionals is $3,000-$7,000.
E. Formal education for the paraprofessionals was mostly in 9-12 years grouping.
F. There is a 50-50 chance that the paraprofessional has lived in the county where she works all her life. Conversely, there is an equal chance she has been mobile.

G. Slightly more than half of the paraprofessionals have received income from sources other than the EFNEP at some time.

H. Approximately one third of the paraprofessionals have joined a club or organization within the last six months and well over three fourths of the paraprofessionals belong to one or more organizations.

Work Profile

I. The overwhelming majority of paraprofessionals worked with between 31-50 families at the time this study was conducted.

J. A majority of the paraprofessionals have worked with EFNEP for more than three years.

K. A friend was the initial means used to find out about the job.

L. The paraprofessionals started this job to help other people.

M. Almost all respondents worked outside the home for pay prior to taking the job of paraprofessional.

Thus, the first purpose of this study was met. Furthermore, data from the Hustey study (1971) and the 1970 census of population data pointed out the similarity of the paraprofessionals and the clientele which tended to substantiate the expectation that the paraprofessionals were in fact, indigenous to the clientele.

The second purpose of the study as expressed through the first major expected finding was to assess the personal benefits,

if any, reported by the paraprofessionals as a result of working with EFNEP. The data pointed out that the paraprofessionals have broadened their lives through looking into further educational possibilities, having ambitions beyond their present position, as well as wanting to improve the nutritional habits of themselves and their personal families. Specifically, the paraprofessionals indicated a definite improvement in their food buying habits. The primary way the paraprofessionals' food buying habits has changed was in price comparisons. If a paraprofessional is frugal with her money and learns ways to cut back on food buying it will benefit the paraprofessional and her family and also the clients since it should be easier to relate personal experiences and practices than if the paraprofessionals had not had such experiences. Respondents in all income brackets changed their food buying habits.

The paraprofessionals who reported a change in consumption of well-balanced meals are now mainly eating more from the basic four food groups. This too would provide the paraprofessionals' experiences to relate to the family clients and it demonstrates that the paraprofessionals are putting into practice the knowledge they are gaining. It is this author's view that these changes by the paraprofessionals indicate benefits they have received from working with EFNEP which the advisors and coordinators were unable to document until the present study.

The data substantiated the major expected finding that the paraprofessionals have derived personal benefits in the area of nutrition.

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program has given the persons who work with it many things that are applicable outside the work situation. No one can ever take away the understanding of people and how to relate to them which the respondents felt were among the most important things they had learned since becoming a paraprofessional.

Have the paraprofessionals bettered themselves through this position? As might have been expected, data to measure this question directly were somewhat harder to obtain than was the case with the previous expected finding. However, there are some indications from the data that the paraprofessionals have a desire to improve themselves. Working with nutrition is still the main ambition reported by several of the respondents while others reported items not previously discussed such as becoming an artist, an author, working with the handicapped, and so on as important ambitions for themselves. The paraprofessionals felt they had benefited from the EFNEP. The degree to which the last major expected finding was supported cannot be fully determined at this time. However, the indications gleaned from the present data were related positively to the major expected finding.

From the data presented in this paper, this author concludes that the paraprofessionals working with the EFNEP in Pennsylvania have benefited from their position. These benefits are in the areas of nutrition knowledge and habit changes and new ways of looking at, relating to, and working with persons. These benefits have been subjective in the past, however objective statements are now possible due to the findings reported from these data in this study as tempered

with findings from selected studies. These benefits to the paraprofessionals should not be overlooked in the future when the EFNEP is evaluated.

In analyzing data, researchers look for discriminating variables to explain and identify characteristics of similarity within groups. In this study race, income, length of service, the number of families with which the paraprofessionals work, formal education, and age were used as the discriminating variables. These variables are acknowledged by sociologists and social scientists to be common discriminating variables. However, when these variables were cross tabulated with the data gathered to meet the purposes of this study little additional information was produced. This indicates that the paraprofessionals in Pennsylvania are at present, a "homogenous" group. Extension personnel should be able to use this information in program planning, i.e., knowing no matter where the paraprofessionals work, what their race, their age, the formal educational level or their length of EFNEP employment, the same in-service programs are applicable to all paraprofessionals.

Implications for Extension Programs

Programming should take into account the people who will be carrying it out. This being the case, Extension personnel should examine their programming efforts in light of the findings reported in this study. One point especially to consider is the age of the paraprofessionals in comparison to the target audience. Programming efforts at present are being directed toward the young homemaker. As reported in this study the age of over three-fourths of the

paraprofessionals was 35 or above. This could produce an identity and/or relating problem between the older paraprofessional and the younger homemaker. This point is brought out for consideration purposes by those working with and hiring paraprofessionals.

In looking at the number of client families with which the paraprofessionals work and realizing that the work is on a one-to-one basis, the extension personal should consider other methods of reaching the client families through the paraprofessionals. One such method could be working in group settings. This teaching technique would involve additional training with the paraprofessionals so that the maximum effectiveness of this method could be attained by the paraprofessionals. In my personal discussions with the paraprofessionals during the pretest they indicated they were more comfortable with the one-to-one method. This further indicates that the paraprofessionals would need further education in order to be effective with group teaching.

Improvements in the paraprofessionals themselves were not easy to find but there were some that stood out. The paraprofessionals demonstrated the ability to think and strive in order to reach goals which might have been out of reach had they not had the opportunity to work as a nutrition paraprofessional. Some respondents felt the need for more education while others reported having personal ambitions in other fields. This indicated that the desire to grow and develop is a part of the paraprofessional makeup. The Cooperative Extension Service, as an educational service, should help provide the paraprofessionals with every opportunity possible to broaden themselves.

Extension knows the vital help the paraprofessionals provide to the low-income families. In addition to this primary task is the development of the paraprofessionals themselves through their working with the EFNEP in total. The paraprofessionals realize the importance of the role they fill and from such a perspective can offer some good tips on ways to improve the program better. The paraprofessionals are taught the art of listening but is Extension listening to the paraprofessionals? They have needs, hopes, and desires which stem from the many benefits that they have received from the program and Extension should make note of them and work to make the program better for the paraprofessionals as well as for the clients. This task should be easier now that a profile of the paraprofessionals has been developed, i.e., "know your audience" has long been a major premise of extension programming.

Footnotes

[1]The United States Department of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service Program is an integral part of the land grant university of each state responsible for developing, promoting and conducting off-campus educational programs in compliance with the responsibilities accepted under the Smith-Lever Act. U. S. Congress, Committee on Agriculture, Cooperative Agricultural Extension work, Report No. 110, 63rd Congress, 2nd Session, 1913. Furthermore, this . . . "Act established a nation-wide system by which knowledge could be transmitted from researchers to people . . . the mandate was to supply educational measures for the individual and the family which would enhance human development and maximize the individual's contributions to his society." (Heasley, 1971:19)

[2]The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program has been set up in all 50 states of the United States of America plus Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. The educational objectives of the program include:

a. To help low-income families improve the nutritional adequacy of their diet.
b. To help families and especially the homemaker to better manage limited resources.
c. To help the homemaker in these families improve their food preparation skills.
d. To help families use better food buying practices.
e. To help families use improved methods of storing food.
f. To encourage families to use the food stamp program or commodity distribution foods.

(Hustey, 1971:6)

[3]ENEP is the Expanded Nutrition Education Program which is the state program. Pennsylvania is only a portion of the federal EFNEP and the title has been changed slightly to distinguish between the two. The goals and objectives are the same for the two programs. In this paper EFNEP will be used for both programs to prevent confusion. There needs to be an awareness that the two titles of the program exist and are both used.

[4]Secord and Backman define role strain as involving situations where an actor is confronted with conflicting or competing expectations and also a great variety of other situations in which an actor experiences difficulty in meeting a role expectation. (Heasley, 1971:19)

[5]ENEP Committee is composed of eleven members, including university staff and representatives of county personnel. The purposes of the ENEP Committee is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the Expanded Nutrition Education Program by advising on various issues related to this program and assisting with coordination among all segments of the organization.

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